

Air Expeditionary Force Budget Officer Training at Aeronautical Systems Center

by Captains Mike Vaughn and Mike Wilson

The call has gone out for 40 comptroller officers to support the Expeditionary Aerospace Force (EAF) concept as deployed budget officers. Thirty of these Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) budget officer positions have been assigned/apportioned to Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC). In turn, AFMC allocated 18 of these positions to Aeronautical Systems Center (ASC) to fill with their comptroller officers. Additionally, AFMC requested that ASC provide training for all of the Command's AEF budget officers. Although deployment of the AEF budget officers has been delayed until March 2000, ASC is well on its way in preparing comptroller officers to deploy. ASC held its first AEF Budget Officer Training session on 27-29 October 1999.

AFMC's Comptroller, Major General Everett G. Odgers, set the tone of this recent training session with his statement, AEF budget officers must be Air Force officers first, warriors second, and comptroller officers third. His message was clear in that budget officers should be officers first, and, as officers, they must be professional leaders who will be held accountable for the important judgments they make. The second priority is to possess warrior skills for survival. Budget officers need to be proficient in areas such as weapons skills, chemical and biological warfare, and self-aid buddy care, to name a few. If they do not possess these skills, they will not be prepared, and the mission will be hampered. Finally, as a comptroller officer, they need to keep the money/funds flowing and properly execute the budget. Overall, these are critical responsibilities that AEF budget officers must fulfill.

But, we are getting a little ahead of ourselves. ASC's AEF Budget Officer Program began when Ms Donna J. Back, ASC Comptroller, selected us as ASC/FMs Unit Deployment Managers. She then directed us to develop a program to ensure that our acquisition professionals were well prepared to deploy in support of any AEF budget officer contingency deployment. The major concern in the development of our training program was that a majority of ASC's acquisition financial management officers did not have the base level budget officer experience required for the deployed contingency environment. A survey of ASC's eligible AEF budget officers found that a majority had base level experience in financial services and very few had base level budget experience. This survey also indicated that a few officers had experience in previous deployments, base exercises, and Top Dollar training. In addition, most ASC comptroller officers

had few opportunities to hone their general military skills (e.g., weapons skills, chemical warfare defense training, and self-aid buddy care). Combined with the limited experience as budget officers and general military skills, we knew that we had a big challenge on our hands.

ASC was given budget officer positions in each of the ten AEFs. Although our first positions would not be tasked to deploy until March 2000 for AEF 5, we knew that we had to develop a training program that was continuous. All of our primary taskings are aligned with the Southwest Asia (SWA) Area of Responsibility (AOR), and our alternate positions are aligned with the European Command (EUCOM) and Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) AORs for the first AEF cycle. We only want to send the very best, was the guidance issued from Lt Col Daniel Bisanti, the ASC Deputy Comptroller. After assigning the most qualified officers to AEF positions, determined by base-level budget officer experience, previous deployment experience, and time on station, we were then ready to begin the training.

Our next step in the process was to brief ASC/FM staff, division chiefs, and AEF budget officers on their responsibilities in preparing for deployment. This mobility orientation brief provided a list of mandatory briefings, military training, appointments, and equipment needed for deployment. Not only were they briefed, but they were formally appointed with a letter from the Comptroller asking for full support of this requirement. Furthermore, we created mobility folders with the miscellaneous letters, documents, forms, and qualification cards needed for each member as they process to their deployment location. In order to gauge the AEF budget officers' progress toward deployment readiness, we developed a training spreadsheet to track the mandatory training requirements. Once everyone knew what was required of them, it was time for us to design a training program to introduce our officers to the world of contingency budget operations.

Ms Back established the charter for our AEF budget officer training with her statement, We want to send only those individuals that are fully prepared to provide financial management guidance and assistance to their deployed commanders. To ensure our training was adequate to prepare these AEF budget officers, we called on individuals that were knowledgeable in deployed financial management issues and in the EAF concept. Our training session was scheduled for three days. The first day consisted of overview briefings, the second day was scenario reviews, and the third day was financial management computer program review and self-aid buddy care training.

CMSgt David Babcock, AFMC/FM Functional Manager, started our first training day with a briefing on the EAF Concept and Combat Comptrollership. His EAF concept brief fully explained the AEF structure and how we, as comptroller officers, fit into this structure. His combat comptrollership brief outlined our responsibilities as contingency budget officers and explained what we must do to fulfill these responsibilities. These briefings were a great start and a solid foundation from which to build the rest of our training. Major General Odgers followed CMSgt Babcock's briefings with his words of encouragement and advice.

Our next presenters provided overviews of financial management operations for the SWA and EUCOM AORs. Mr Jim Evans, who is dual-hatted as a budget analyst for U S Central Air Force (USCENTAF) and 9th Air Force, provided the SWA AOR briefing. Mr Dave Sembach, formerly the Chief of Contingency Budget Operations at USAFE/FM and currently at AFIT/RP, provided the EUCOM AOR briefing. Both of these briefings were of great benefit to all in attendance. These gentlemen provided the "big picture" of financial management operations for their respective AORs. With this knowledge, our officers will be able to provide their deployed commanders with a financial management perspective that will ensure the success of their contingency operations.

Our last briefer of day one was Capt George Govan, Working Capital Fund Program Analyst at HQ AFMC/FM. Captain Govan briefed on his experience as the Prince Sultan Air Base Comptroller/Budget Officer. He held this position from March through August 1999. His briefing was of interest to all. In addition to discussing the AEF budget officer roles and responsibilities, he briefed the current financial management issues that are impacting SWA AOR budget officers. We felt that his brief capped the day off perfectly. Captain Govan's brief tied together all of the day's briefings by depicting the need for AEF budget officers to be professional Air Force officers, warriors, and comptroller officers.

Day two of training consisted of scenarios and a briefing on SWA AOR entitlements and awards. The scenarios provided an opportunity for the officers to familiarize themselves with the regulations and instructions that provide guidance for deployed financial operations. Because the majority of our budget officers are scheduled for the SWA AOR for the current AEF cycle, we had Mr Jim Evans on-hand to provide the SWA AOR answer to our scenarios. Additionally, Mr Evans briefed on the military pay entitlements as well as the awards that are available to Air Force members stationed in the SWA AOR. Although our comptroller officers will be tasked as budget officers, they still need to be aware of these entitlements, so they may provide full support to their commanders.

Day three of training consisted of Microbased Budget Automated System (MicroBAS) and Self-Aid Buddy Care training. Mr Evans taught the class to import data and reports into MicroBAS. The class was also instructed how to sort, filter, and manipulate the MicroBAS data into various formats. This training provided participants with the capability to adequately monitor, manage, and report the financial status of their deployed site to the Commander. Our Self-Aid Buddy Care was provided by SSgt Jim Ritchie of the Technical Services Branch in ASC. The Self-Aid Buddy Care training consisted of an instructional how-to video that covered all the basic lifesaving steps to take when a person is injured. After the video, there was a discussion on these techniques, and a test was given for review and comprehension of survival techniques.

Although the course is a basic introduction to contingency budget operations, we felt confident that we provided the tools necessary for the officers to hone their budgeting skills through self study. Our plan is to offer this class on a semiannual basis. Future plans include more of an emphasis on the EUCOM AOR, due to our upcoming taskings there in January 2001. Moreover, we will need to look at the "big picture" and have the 12th Air Force brief the SOUTHCOM AOR. Additionally, we will develop a continuous review process of training scenarios by the returning AEF budget officers to ensure the scenarios continue to be realistic.

We would like to thank all of the instructors for volunteering their time and for making the first-ever AEF budget officer class a success. All of their contributions were vital in ensuring we followed the AFMC deployment philosophy as stated by CMSgt Babcock, We send trained people on deployments, we do not send people on deployments for training. Their real world perspectives on contingency budgeting made the class a real eye opener for those who attended. Lieutenant Holzmer, a Finance Officer from Tinker AFB said, . . . It was an excellent course for those financial managers with little budget experience, and I feel much more comfortable now with potential AEF deployments on the horizon.



About the Authors



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